

Testimony to the Government Administration and Elections Committee
March 16, 2009

Presented by Maureen Chaput, 56 River Road, Mansfield Center, CT

Thank you for hearing my testimony today concerning HB6375, specifically section 2 (e) 6. Thank you also for your service to Connecticut as legislators, especially during difficult times like this current season of economic trouble. I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of the testimony you hear today.

My name is Maureen Chaput. I have worked in Connecticut and Massachusetts as an ASL interpreter for the past 30 years and for the last 10 of those I have also served in administrative and supervisory positions in both public and private agencies. I currently manage a Sorenson Video Relay Service call center in Farmington. Prior to taking this position I served as the Interpreting Services Supervisor for the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. I will take just a few minutes to share some specific insights and expertise gained through my years of management and administrative work.

No doubt you have already spent many hours considering the pros and cons of any budget choices made by this legislative body and will spend many more weighing the costs and benefits of those choices. Indeed, this public hearing is a means for you to gather data to incorporate into that decision-making process. I submit to you now my recommendation to consider carefully the potential risks to the State of Connecticut and to its cities and towns if you choose at this time to invoke the sunset clause and dismantle the CT CDHI and BESB. This is especially important because a simple glance at the raw numbers of deaf people, or people who are blind or have low-vision, might lead to a hasty decision that it is not cost-effective to maintain agencies that specifically serve these populations. The cost/benefit analysis, however, is much more complicated than a simple formula of dollars per person served.

As you know, the ADA, Title II, requires state and local governments to make programs and services accessible to people with disabilities. You may not know, however, that the burden of responsibility assigned to state and local governments to comply with the requirements of the ADA are significantly stricter than those applied to private business. You may know that one of the accommodations the ADA lists for people who are deaf or hearing-impaired is the use of qualified sign language interpreters. But you may not know that the ADA's definition of qualified interpreters ("able to interpret accurately, impartially and effectively, incorporating ...") is not easy to interpret without a significant amount of experience in the field and exposure to the language.

As you consider the costs of maintaining the CT CDHI and BESB, please include in your assessment of liability the potential costs inherent in failing to meet the obligations of the ADA. Include in the assets column the protection afforded to the state of Connecticut and to its cities and towns, by having agencies which specialize in serving the needs of low-incidence disabilities and thus providing the expertise and knowledge necessary for effective provision of services. The services provided by these agencies help every department of state government to meet their obligations under the ADA and other state and federal legislation. When you decide to continue the operations of these agencies you are simultaneously ensuring continued access to our court system, helping DCF to fulfill their obligations, and ensuring that the legislative process is accessible to all Connecticut's citizens.